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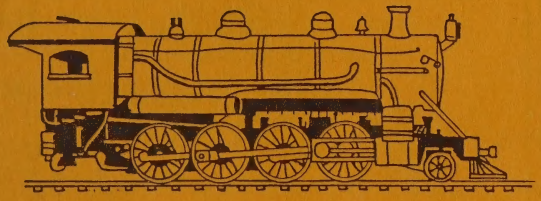
THE HISTORY OF THE BIZZ JOHNSON TRAIL



RAILS TO TRAILS

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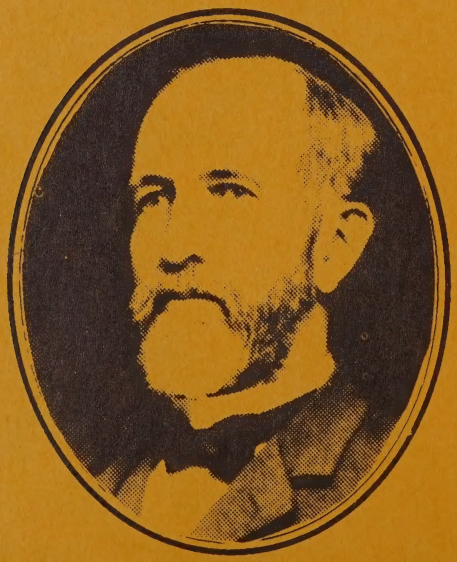
A NOSTALGIC TRIP ON THE BIZZ JOHNSON TRAIL

The Bizz Johnson Trail occupies the old right of way of the Southern Pacific Fernley and Lassen branch line railroad between Susanville and Mason Station, four miles north of Westwood. This branch was one section of a proposed line intended to connect Portland, Oregon, with San Diego, California, traveling through Klamath Falls, Susanville and points in Nevada.

WHO WAS THOMAS BARLOW WALKER?

Thomas Barlow Walker was a Minnesota lumberman, founder and head of the Red River Lumber Company. His business dealings shaped the future of northeastern California. He started acquiring lands in northeastern California during the 1890s. These lands were very remote and scarcely populated, which enabled Walker to procure them cheaply, for later development.



THOMAS BARLOW WALKER

Map showing California Southern Pacific Company, its subsidiary Central Pacific railroad lines and other Southern Pacific lines

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During the first part of 1907, Southern Pacific heard rumors of Walker's plans for large-scale development of the pine forests of northeastern California. This coincided with Southern Pacific plans to open up the northern area. During the next four years, railroad construction crews were very busy in Nevada, California, and Oregon.

An early scene of the Big Mill in Westwood, California. Circa 1914.

PLANS FOR WESTWOOD

By the beginning of 1910, planning for a large sawmill had been launched in what is now Westwood. The Walker family had organized a work force to start construction of the mill during 1912. It was to be one of the most elaborate and modern mills anywhere in the country. They also signed a contract with Southern Pacific to build a railroad to Westwood. The Southern Pacific was in turn promised exclusive rights to haul Red River timber and lumber for five years.

In order to provide the lumber for the Big Mill, and for some of the first community buildings, a smaller Mill B was built. With the Big Mill complete, construction

Loaded log cars on the way to the Red River's Big Mill. Red River advertised that their Westwood Mill had a capacity of 250,000,000 board feet annually. (Harrison)

picked up speed and by the end of 1914 Westwood was beginning to be established and the Big Mill had cut its first log.

Back in April of 1913, railroad construction had reached Susanville from Fernley, Nevada, but the most grueling stretch was yet to come The Susan River Canyon posed great difficulty, as there was heavy rock work to be done, two tunnels to be built, and twelve crossings of the river to be bridged. Three lives were lost during the construction in the canyon, but by the end of February 1914 the rails were laid into Westwood, terminus of the Fernley and Lassen Branch.

Early photograph of the railroad depot area in Westwood. (Purdy)

WESTWOOD MILL PRODUCTION

The Walkers succeeded in building a total lumber manufacturing center at Westwood. In addition to the Big Mill, the complex also supported a box factory, lath mill, moulding and siding department, sash and door factory, and veneer plant. This enabled the Westwood mill to produce just about any sort of building material requested of them.

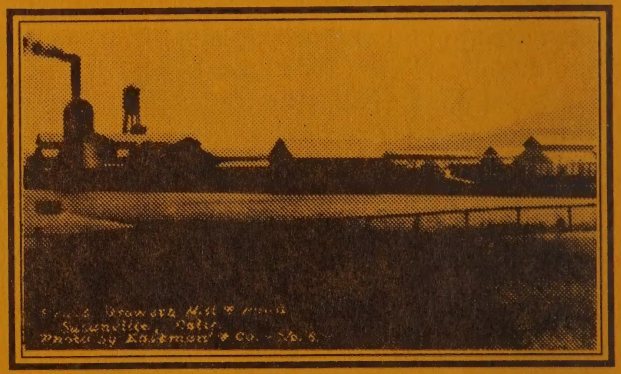
Products manufactured at Westwood were shipped all over the world. The editor of the **Westwood Independent** summed it up when he wrote:

> *"I know, or I think I know, that the Red River Lumber is built into the flumes of Alaska gold Mines, into the red barns of the middle west farms, in the hospitals, barracks and deserted trenches of Europe, is rebuilding French towns, is strewn along the African Coast from Algiers to Capetown, built into Kaffir corrals, and the diamond mines of Kimberly, from Rio to Cape Horn, from Callao to Valparaiso."*
>
> *"If the year's shipment could be placed in one big train of solid loaded boxcars, the engine would be almost to Salt Lake City, and the caboose in Westwood." [A distance of 640 miles.]*

In seven years Westwood had grown from a lumber camp to a thriving city of 5,000 people. It had become one of the largest milltowns in California. Community services in Westwood provided electricity, telephones, water, sewer, and garbage pickup. Many of the homes were supplied with steam from the mill's power plant.

Lassen Lumber and Box Company's circular sawmill at Susanville, California. One of two sawmills within their mill complex. Circa 1920. (Purdy)

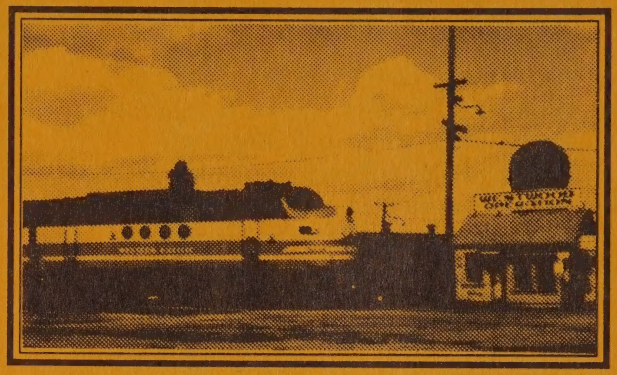
The company store carried a extensive inventory It was stated by the local newspaper that you could buy anything from "candy to cars" in the big store of the Red River. Westwood was complete and self-sufficient. About the only thing not to be found was demon rum. Westwood was dry for many years.



Fruit Growers Supply Co.mpany Mill at Susanville, California. The Company was operated by Sunkist, the citrus people. Circa 1925. (Fruit Growers Supply Company

Fruit Growers Supply Company interchanged log cars here at Westwood Junction with the Southern Pacific. Circa 1929. (Stanford)

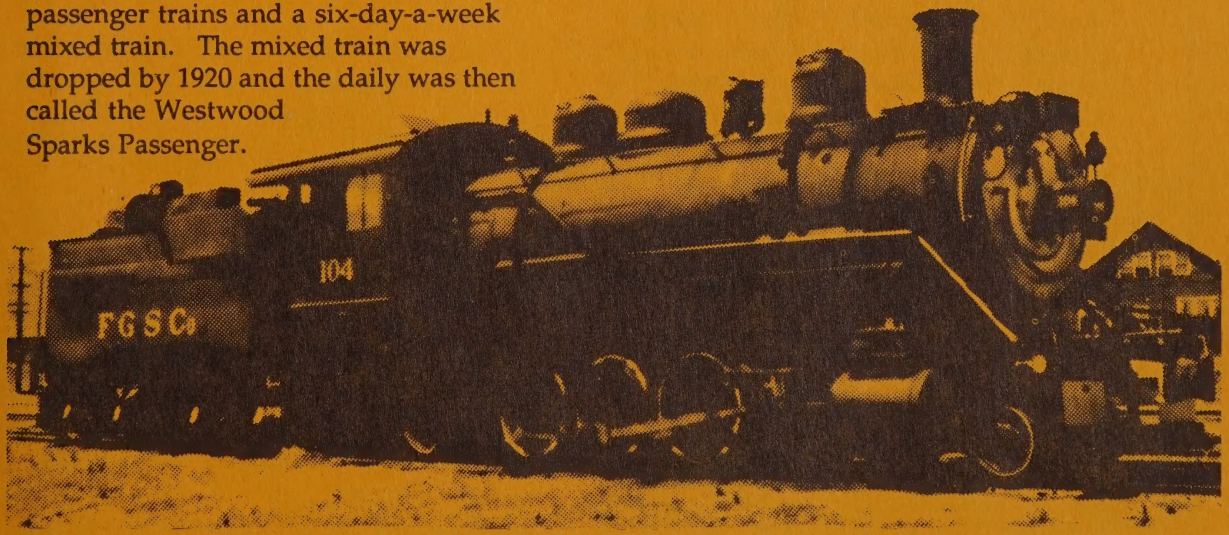
By 1934, after several name changes, the passenger service to Westwood ended. Some other names it was know by were: the Nevada Express in 1924, the Tahoe in 1928, and the Sierra in 1929. In September of 1929 it became known either as #33 or #34, depending upon which direction it was going.



A Western Pacific train passes the main gate at the Westwood Big Mill. Circa 1950. (Martinez Sr.)

THE TRAINS OF THE FERNLEY AND LASSEN BRANCH

The Southern Pacific operated passenger, freight, and logging trains over the Fernley and Lassen Branch for many years. At first Westwood was served by a mixed train which contained both passenger and freight cars. This train connected with a daily passenger train from Hazen, Nevada at Susanville. By 1918 Westwood was being served by two passenger trains and a six-day-a-week mixed train. The mixed train was dropped by 1920 and the daily was then called the Westwood Sparks Passenger.

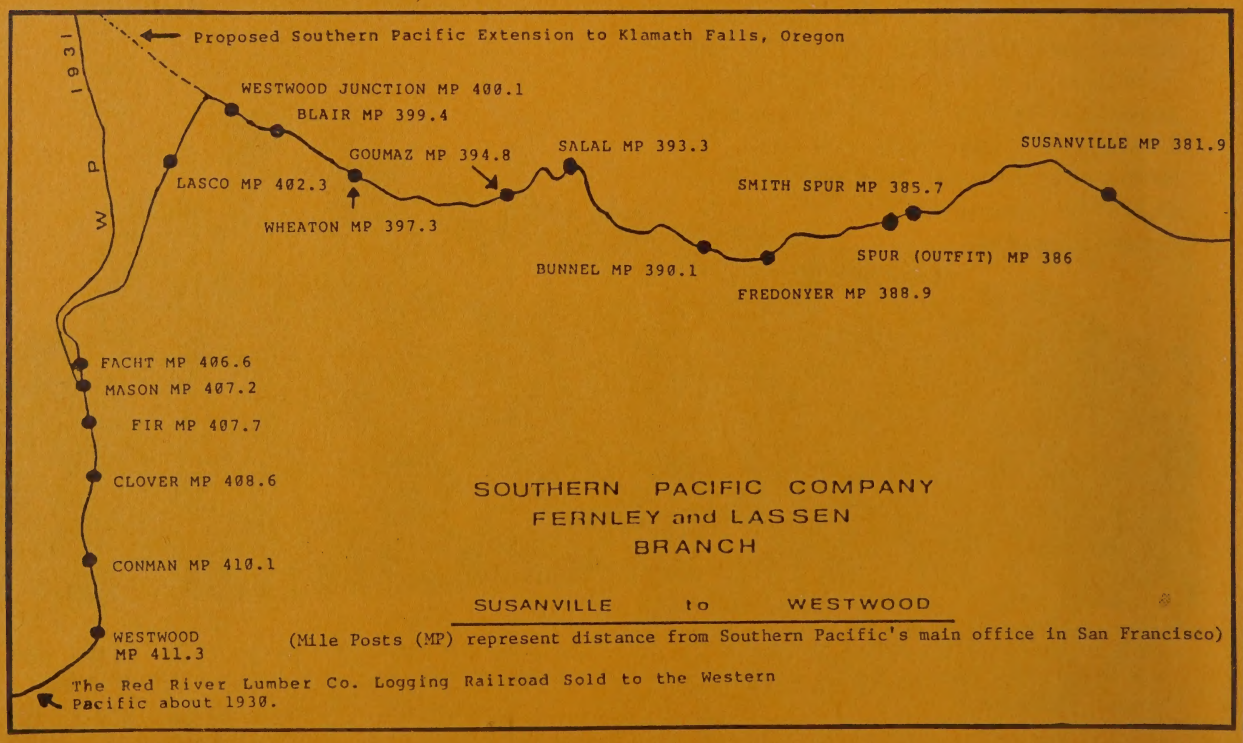


Short on steam engines during World War II, Red River purchased this engine during 1943. It was then sold to the Fruit Growers Supply Company when Red River sold out in December 1944. (John Pickett, Bender Collection)

The Fernley and Lassen Branch was a very busy railway during the peak of its use. In 1921, in addition to Red River Lumber Company in Westwood, there were two major mills operating out of Susanville: the Lassen Lumber and Box Company and Fruit Growers Supply Company. Their timber was shipped from forest to mill via the Susan River Canyon on Southern Pacific rails.

The Lassen Lumber and Box Company, established in 1918, ran its railroad into the woods at Facht and Lasco, two logging camps between Westwood Junction and Mason Station. (See map below.) In 1920, Fruit Growers Supply Company began building and operating a logging railroad from Westwood Junction into their timber holdings adjacent to Red River property. This was the longest-lived logging railroad connected with Southern Pacific's Fernley and Lassen Branch, operating until the end of 1952.

These two logging railroads connected with the Fernley and Lassen Branch, and logs that interchanged with the Southern Pacific made their way down the Susan River Canyon to Susanville. The Red River Lumber Company had trackage rights over the Fernley and Lassen as far east as Blair Station. There they operated a logging railroad that tapped timber holdings around Worley Peak (Roop Mountain).



THE END OF AND ERA

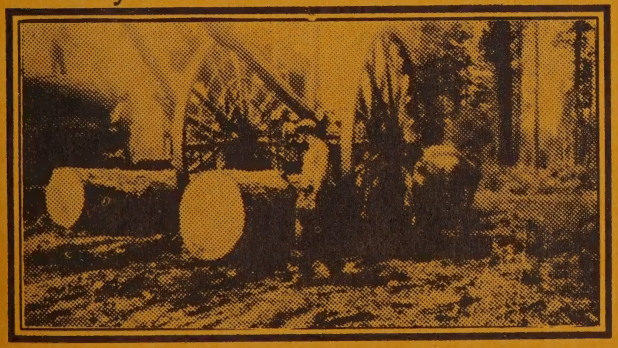
The 1930s brought both the Western Pacific Railroad and the depression to Westwood. Competition with the Western Pacific slowed the local freight business somewhat. In an effort to raise cash, Red River Lumber Company sold the inventories of Westwood's stores and shops and the property was leased by new tenants.

In December 1944, the mill, town, and about 100,000 acres of timber was sold. The new owners, Fruit Growers Supply Company, operated the town and mill much in the same manner as the Walkers. However, many employees missed the Walkers. It was the end of an era in Westwood.

Seasonally operated Southern Pacific logging trains continued to run north to Westwood Junction until the end of 1952 when Fruit Growers Supply Company abandoned its logging railroad and logging camp.

The Westwood local freight was the last of the trains to ply the rails of the Fernley and Lassen Branch when in 1956 bridge number two near Susanville washed out and burned. There were attempts to revive the branch between Susanville and Mason Station, but none were successful. The rails lay rusted and abandoned. In 1976 the Southern Pacific filed for abandonment. Approval to legally abandon the Fernley and Lassen Branch between Susanville and Westwood was granted by the Interstate Commerce Commission in 1978. The section of rails between Mason Station and Westwood was sold to the Western Pacific and operation over this segment now continues as part of Union Pacific Railroad system.

Logs being brought into Camp Lasco where they are interchanged with the Southern Pacific for the trip to Susanville. Circa 1923. (Lassen County Historical Society)



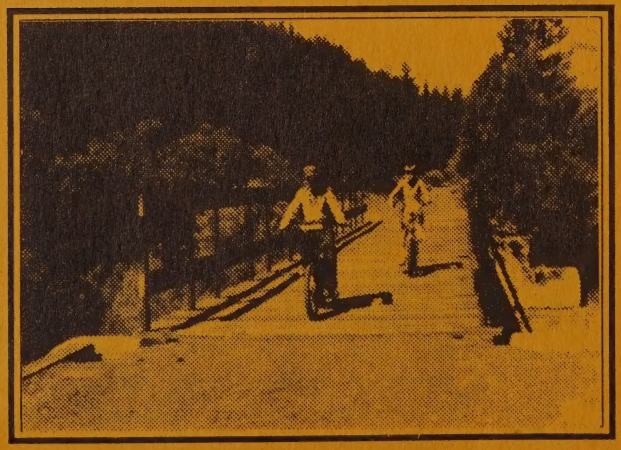
Skidding logs with Big Wheels and horses to the loading area (landing) near Camp Lasco. Lassen Lumber and Box Co.mpany operation near Westwood Junction. Circa 1923. (Lassen County Historical Society)

A cut of logs waiting to be unloaded into the Lassen Lumber and Box Company's pond in Susanville. Circa 1923. (Lassen County Historical Society)

RAILS TO TRAILS

Where steam engines once hauled logs to Susanville and Westwood mills and lumber products to distant markets, bicyclists, hikers, horseback riders and joggers now explore the scenic Susan River Canyon. Through a Rails-to-Trails conversion the 30-mile segment of the Fernley and Lassen Branch line between Susanville and Westwood is now the Bizz Johnson Trail. Managed by the Susanville District, Bureau of Land Management and the Lassen National Forest, the Bizz Johnson Trail is a multiple use, non-motorized recreational trail. During winter months snowmobiling is allowed on the trail's western half.

Congress designated the Bizz Johnson Trail in 1983 in recognition of former California Congressman Harold T. "Bizz" Johnson. The trail serves to recognize his work on behalf of the trail and other public projects during the 22 years (1958-1980) he represented Northern California in the U.S. House of Representatives.



The Bizz Johnson Trail, like the Fernley and Lassen Branch, continues to contribute to the well-being of the communities it serves. As the railroad was a transportation link between Susanville and Westwood, the trail now links the towns recreationally. Through its Rails-to-Trails conversion, the Fernley and Lassen Branch once again is serving the communities of Susanville and Westwood in an exciting new era as the Bizz Johnson Trail.

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Brochure prepared by BLM Volunteers:
John Forrest and Jim Bryant

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